District Review Report

School District No. 35 (Langley)

February 8-11, 2004

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Dick Chambers, Superintendent, School District No. 57 (Prince George)

District Review Report

2003/2004

District Name:	Langley
District Number:	35
Superintendent:	Don Truscott
Date of Visit:	February 8 – 11, 2004
Team Chair:	Dick Chambers, Superintendent, School District No. 57 (Prince George)
Team Members:	Sheila Borman, Principal, SD 41 (Burnaby) Rhonda Dunsmuir, Vice Principal, SD 23 (Central Okanagan) Jiemei Li, Education Officer, Ministry of Education Andy Krawczyk, Principal, SD 39 (Vancouver) Tom McGrory, Teacher, SD 37 (Delta) Angus McKierahan, Community Services Manager, Ministry of Children and Family Development Kathy Sawchuk, Director of Instruction, SD 59 (Peace River South) Zane Spencer, Principal, SD 74 (Gold Trail) Terri Watson, Parent, SD 78 (Fraser-Cascade)

Context

Langley is the 8th largest school district in the Province with a student population of 20,927, which has been stable since September, 2002. The community is suburban, with a mix of business, light industry and agriculture. According to the 1996 census, the median family income ($50,600) is above the provincial average, and the percentage of English as a Second Language (4.4%) is less than one-third of the provincial average.

The District has 33 elementary, 7 secondary, 2 alternate, 1 middle and 2 elementary/secondary schools offering a diversity of choice in schools and programs including Fine Arts, International Baccalaureate, Fundamental, French Immersion and a home/school partnership. Thirty percent of students attend a school outside their catchment area.

The District's student enrolment for English as a Second Language (2.3%) is below the provincial average (9.6%) while French Immersion (6.1%) is above (5.3%). The Aboriginal population (5.4%) is lower than the provincial average (8.1%).

The District has a long history of decentralized budgeting and annual school planning for the improvement of student performance. It also enjoys a climate of good working relationships among the various staff and parent groups.

District Review Report

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Summary of Process

The purpose of the District Review is to provide feedback and recommendations to the District, the Ministry of Education and the public regarding the District's work in improving student achievement by:

- Reviewing district and school achievement data;
- Reviewing the District's Accountability Contract and school plans to improve student achievement;
- Making recommendations to the Board and the Minister of Education about improving student achievement; and
- Identifying promising practices that will assist other districts and schools in their efforts to improve student achievement.

School District No. 35 (Langley) is one of twenty districts to be reviewed in the 2003/2004 school year as part of the Ministry of Education's accountability cycle.

To this end the Team reviewed the District's Accountability Contract and its results pertaining to student achievement and:

- met with members of the Board, Senior Staff, and partner group representatives on Sunday afternoon to review the District's characteristics, its processes and its Accountability Contract;
- visited six secondary schools, one secondary alternate school, one middle school, and twenty-one elementary schools.
    - at the school, the Team met with the School Planning Council – the principal, teacher, parents, students – and often with additional staff and parents in order to support the written information;
- met with District Parent Advisory Council representatives, representatives of the Aboriginal Advisory Committee, and the School Planning Council Steering Committee.

Additional data considered:

In addition to the District's Accountability Contract and the schools' Growth Plan the District Review Team considered the following:

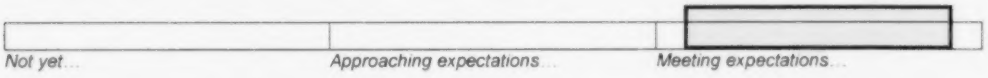
- District Aboriginal Program binder,
- Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement,
- Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement Progress Report, 2003-2004,
- School Examination Trends (by Adminfo),
- District and School Performance Reports (2002), produced by the Ministry of Education,
- Satisfaction Survey Report,
- District Provincial Exam and Scholarship Results Report, and
- Parent Involvement Handbook.

Acknowledgements

The Team appreciated the open and professional approach they encountered throughout the District. District and school personnel, parents and students were all well prepared to discuss the school and district plans. There was an obvious pride in both the way in which the District works and in the achievements of its students. The Team thanks the learning community of School District No. 35 for its time and obvious commitment to the success of its children.

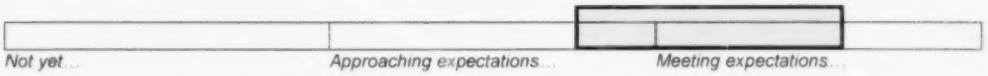
Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*
   Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



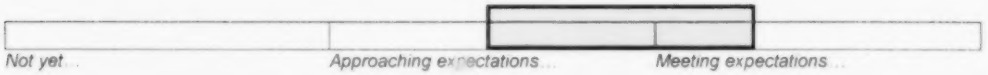
- Goals are consistently focused on student learning.
- Some schools should consider being more specific when they write their goal statements.
- Schools may also wish to consider using the District model of including objectives.

2. *Rationale:*
   Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, **based on evidence**, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



- The District may wish to include a rationale section to its School Growth Plan template.
- Schools may wish to consider a comment about the range of data considered when selecting the goal, i.e. why writing was selected over reading or numeracy.
- Some schools could have a more precise alignment between the goal/objective, the indicators used to determine progress, and the intervention strategies planned.

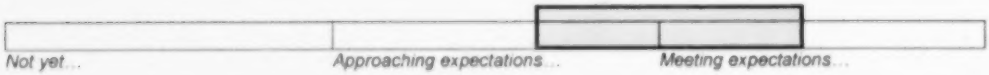
3. *Data:*
   Improving districts and schools are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school, district and provincial data. The analysis of this evidence informs the selection of the district goals and is used to monitor progress.



- The District has created a very useful matrix of performance indicators and targets for both the District and schools - Summary of Targets (Appendix B)

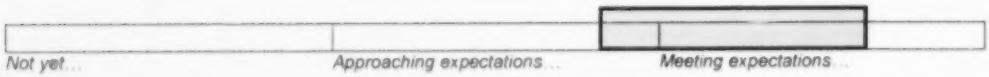
- There is support for District-wide assessments such as the Grade 3, 6, 9 Numeracy and the PM Benchmarks – Grade 2
- Some schools could increase their skill in using data to inform practice.
- Some schools are using fewer than three sources of data, or are not yet using a variety (classroom/school/district/province) of data sources.

4. *Strategies:*
Improving districts and schools have well-organized, focused improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



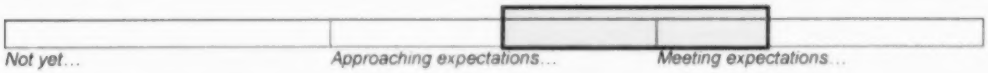
- Many exemplars of 'best practice' strategies are used in Langley schools.
- Continued opportunities for sharing these strategies would be beneficial.
- Some strategies need to focus more on changing or adjusting instructional practice than on student activities.

5. *Structures:*
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, organizations – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



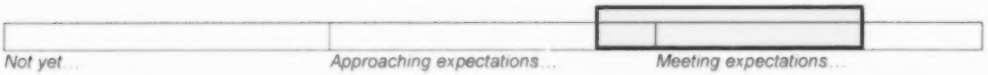
- Many innovative approaches were noted including:
    - use of intersession time in a balanced calendar approach in order to deliver extra instruction,
    - extensive use of community volunteers,
    - the use of extended days,
    - learning opportunities for parents,
    - incorporating day care into schools,
    - adjusting administrative time to enable additional support service,
    - after school tutorials, and
    - Reading and Rec program – a Kindergarten and Grade 1 summer reading program.
- The District provides extra staffing for inner city schools.
- Additional resources are also available to schools under the 'Greater Needs Funding' program.
- The District's professional development model and culture are tremendous assets. The CTAP – Commitment to Action Program and the Vogue catalogue, for example, reflect the District's alignment of resources to support schools.
- The decentralized budget model allows for the differentiation of resources at the school level.

6. *Results:*
Improving districts and schools get improved results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



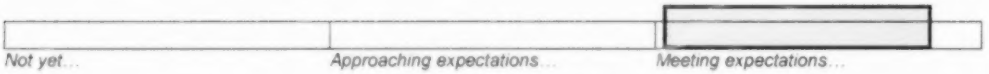
- The District's results are near, and, in many cases, above provincial standards.
- The District has a sound, clearly articulated plan to enhance student learning.
- The District needs to continue to coach schools to monitor results consistently, and to make appropriate adjustments.

7. *Communication:*
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



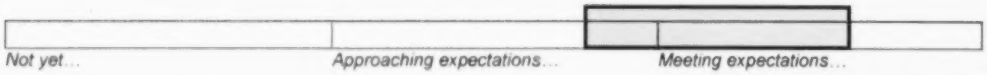
- The School Planning Council Steering Committee is a positive asset to aid communication between groups.
- Parents on School Planning Councils are both informed and engaged in the dialogue on student achievement.
- Secondary schools and some elementary schools have email list-serves. Additionally, some schools are using school and class web sites as a way of communicating with parents.
- Many opportunities for person-to-person contact and support were noted.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence*
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school district directions are both valued.



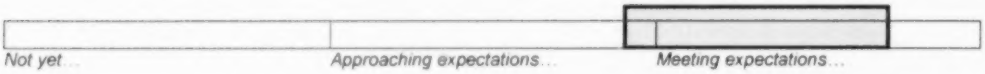
- The positive culture in the District supports collaboration between the schools and the District.
- Within the District's framework, which outlines clear expectations, there is sufficient flexibility for schools to choose goals that reflect their unique needs.

9. *Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement*:
Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- Three training sessions for School Planning Councils have been provided, as well as an orientation session for new members this year. These sessions were well received and the District should consider continuing them.
- A number of excellent initiatives have been undertaken including:
    - The Parent Involvement Handbook;
    - The Parent Involvement Implementation Committee; and
    - The implementation of the Epstein model to encourage parent involvement.
- The Aboriginal Advisory Committee is committed to involving the aboriginal community through family gatherings, opportunities for parent learning, and aboriginal cultural performances.
- The Lochiel U-Connect School is a unique partnership between the District and home-school families.
- The District recognizes the need to include the District Parent Advisory Council perspective in the planning of the District Accountability Contract.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork*:
Leaders in improving districts and schools have a clear vision for, and commitment, to improving achievement for all students. Leadership at all levels, in all roles, is encouraged and systematically developed in a collaborative learning community with a focus on improving student achievement.



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- Teacher leadership and commitment are evident in the wide variety of teacher-led professional development activities offered throughout the District.
- Many opportunities exist for teachers to share best practices.
- Otter Elementary – a demonstration school for exemplary teaching practices -is a provincial asset.
- There are leadership academies for potential administrators.
- Many District committees are broadly based.
- There are significant opportunities for parent involvement, training and leadership at the school and district levels.
- The District may wish to consider how it could support student leadership opportunities at the District level.

Strengths

The Team observed many strengths related to student achievement in Langley schools including:

- A very well developed and clearly laid out District Plan;
- A District vision that has long-term support and an action, or results focus;
- Professional Development and Instructional Services support;
- A culture of collaboration amongst all stakeholder groups, notably a collaborative relationship with the Aboriginal communities it serves;
- District support for parent involvement;
- The number of choices available to parents and their children;
- Knowledgeable and involved School Planning Councils; and
- Flexibility in budgeting and local decision-making, which allow schools to align structures to support achievement.

Promising Practices

The District or school practices that could be helpful to other districts with a similar focus include:

- Parent Involvement Handbook
- Members of Parent Advisory Committees presenting educational issues to parents after consulting with school personnel – parent-to-parent leadership
- Summer reading programs for at-risk elementary students
- A variety of Aboriginal Initiatives including
    - 1500 cultural presentations,
    - Aboriginal 'Artist in Residence' program,
    - Summer reading program for aboriginal primary students, and
    - Commitment to Action Program for Aboriginal Support Workers.

Recommendations

Team recommendations for strengthening school and district focus on student achievement and for improving results:

- Continue to develop district and school-level assessments and indicators.
- Continue to encourage the use of performance standards as a school-level indicator.
- Discuss with schools the alignment of the planning cycle and the data cycle.
- The school template could benefit from some of the strengths of the District template. For example, a section for "Rationale" and "Structures" might be added.
- Continue to increase skill in using data to inform practice and in connecting strategies to the objectives they are purporting to accomplish.

The biggest challenge for School District No. 35 (Langley) with so many well-developed strengths is to increase the consistency of its best practices.